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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0609  
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1936  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8972  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7210  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5153  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3350  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5109  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1386  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0644  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4219  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9533  
RUEHB1/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6833  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 1315  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3765  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000940

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/08/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL PREF PHUM PTER FAID MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA MAKES GOOD PROGRESS ON CHILD SOLDIER  
ISSUE

REF: COLOMBO 728

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION VALERIE FOWLER. REASONS: 1.4 (B  
, D)

¶1. (C) The latest update from UNICEF personnel in Colombo indicates the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) continues to make good progress toward eliminating the problem of child soldiers. UNICEF told Post in early October that only 15 child soldiers remained in the ranks of the TMVP, and it continued to be likely that these remaining cases will be resolved by the end of the year. The GSL appeared to have taken full ownership of the problem and was conducting police investigations on child recruitment and on the whereabouts of the remaining 15 children. Recently, two commanders were arrested in Batticaloa on child recruitment charges, but there had been no further progress on their case since then. UNICEF nonetheless credited Justice Secretary Suhada Gamalath for pushing hard to resolve outstanding cases and creating a political climate that encouraged elimination of the child soldier problem. UNICEF also said U.S. support of these efforts played an important role in their success.

¶2. (C) The GSL has more work remaining in dealing with the problem it inherited of child soldiers recruited by the LTTE, often forcibly, in the final weeks and months of the conflict. UNICEF reported that as of the end of September, 527 surrendered LTTE children remained under detention, with 456 in Vavuniya and 71 in the Ambepusa rehabilitation facility. The GSL continued to hold adult LTTE ex-combatants in separate facilities. According to UNICEF, the GSL had three options for dealing with ex-LTTE child soldiers: sending them home, if their families could be found; sending them to "accommodation centers"; or assigning them to a rehabilitation center, akin to those for adult LTTE ex-fighters. The GSL was still working through this process, and it was not yet clear what these "accommodation centers" would entail or how the rehabilitation process would function. Most suggestions by GSL officials hinted at such things as vocational training, psycho-social education, and

other programs aimed at ensuring the children had skills to survive in society once released.

COMMENT

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¶3. (C) Post concurs with the UNICEF assessment that the GSL has made substantial progress towards eliminating the problem of child soldiers, and we believe it is realistic to expect the GSL to complete the process soon. The GSL needs to ensure that there continues to be zero tolerance on the policy of child recruitment and to step up efforts on such follow-on issues as tracing and re-unifying families, the release of children to homes or to host families, and re-integration of the children in society. While the GSL has a long way to go in improving its overall human rights record, the issue of child soldiers is a good news story.

BUTENIS